

Put Mauritius top of your post-Covid-19 travel list: Touring the Aubergine Garden at LUX* Belle Mare

By  Debbie Hathway

23 Jun 2020

Getting used to the new normal under the coronavirus pandemic does nothing to abate the need to travel to Mauritius.

It rained last night, a gentle hush that left the outside world quiet except for the waking birds. Although I am not a birder, really, that is a sound I crave, together with the sing-song Creolian soundtrack to resort life – the chatter of the staff as they go about their daily routines.



Mauritius officially Covid-19 free

19 May 2020



I'm not in Mauritius now, but I'll be on a plane headed for the island as soon as the borders open to those willing to test the hygiene measures implemented by the tourism industry as they attempt to bounce back from the onslaught of the coronavirus pandemic. Just as Mauritius as a whole is my happy place, the island ticks many boxes for locals too. It's no surprise the island is ranked the happiest country in Africa for the second consecutive year, and they can't wait to welcome people back to their little piece of paradise.

French-born Executive Pastry Chef Pascal Galette is one of the chefs who has found his niche at the award-winning LUX* Belle Mare on the east coast of Mauritius. He is a magician with pastry, and an artist when it comes to working with chocolate. "I worked for a long time in Provence, with one of the best chefs – the late Roger Vergé. I was 14 when I met him," says Galette. "I started in the kitchen and saw one guy in the corner calmly making extraordinary and elegant creations with chocolate and pastry. I decided I wanted to be like that."



Organic plantation

Galette's happy place has recently become way more specific – a hydroponic Aubergine Garden set back from a stretch of road in front of the resort that I've driven hundreds of times. What chef wouldn't love a veggie and herb garden of this calibre on their doorstep? "For all chefs, it is a wonderful occasion to grow veggies and herbs in a natural environment and it gives us the amazing experience of connecting to nature, experiencing different senses and tastes," he says. "In my opinion, every chef dreams about having a little organic plantation so they can use fresh products in their cuisine."



Tucked behind fields of vegetables worked by locals, I was proud to be the first outsider invited to admire this LUX* Belle Mare novelty, which thankfully could still be carefully tended throughout the Mauritius government-imposed lockdown imposed to control and stabilise the effect of the coronavirus on the island.

Sensory delights

My visit to LUX* Belle Mare was late last year. We spent a precious hour or two touring the prized Aubergine Garden and sampling its bounty in the form of a light lunch prepared by Subi Mungroo, Chef de Cuisine at the resort's Amari by Vineet.



It's a sensory experience, walking into the hydroponic greenhouses, sealed off from predators who might sully the gorgeous green leaves or pierce the produce. I can still taste what was on my plate – a simple gazpacho soup and tomatoes salad, deceptively filling, and perfect for hot summer days. It was an elegant sufficiency, as my grandmother used to say, made all the more special by my host Elvis Follet, Cluster Public Relations Manager.

“Guests will be able to enjoy the tour too, immersing themselves in the traditional way of agriculture in Mauritius and enjoying the pleasure of being so close to Mother Earth,” says Follet. “The Aubergine Farm has come along a long way from where we initially started. Two hydroponic greenhouses now produce enough insecticide- and chemical-free greens and tomatoes to meet the needs of LUX* Belle Mare, LUX* Grand Gaube and SALT of Palmar restaurants.”

The experience includes a walk around the farm and hydroponic greenhouses. Guests can also participate in the seeding process.



The Mauritian way

As a reminder of what I'm missing thanks to the coronavirus travel restrictions, I was recently given a Mauritian soup to try. I took one sip and shivered – in a good way, the way your body reacts to something life-giving that your brain might have been trying to deny. It's the first Mauritian dish I've had off the island – my reaction proving once again that the island has a few more things that I crave.



I joke that I go there to eat (at least three times a year), but it's a thing with me. I live off (mostly) healthy takeaways when I'm at home but when I'm in Mauritius I come alive. I eat healthier and feel better when I'm there. If I could bottle that feeling and bring it home with me I would. Fortunately, I have my writing as an outlet and I can share my experiences with readers and relive it all.

As I savoured that soup, filled with a special mix of herbs, spices and flavours, made with love, the memories came rushing back. I'm first in line to get my long overdue dose of care and attention the LUX* team is expert at lavishing on their precious guests. Meanwhile, I continue to dream. Literally.



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Welcome home

Since the onset of the coronavirus, the LUX* Collective has been at the forefront of devising and implementing measures to make their destinations as inviting as ever for guests around the world. With wellbeing top of mind, their Mauritius resorts are already open to locals with stringent measures in place to ensure the ongoing health of teams and visitors alike. SALT of Palmar is already open, and welcoming guests. LUX* Belle Mare is scheduled to reopen refreshed on 1 October and LUX* Grand Gaube on 1 August.



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ABOUT DEBBIE HATHWAY

Debbie Hathway is an award-winning writer, with a special interest in luxury lifestyle (watches, jewellery, travel, property investment) and the arts.

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